



U.S. Department of Justice

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For Immediate Release:

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January 27, 2005

Event: Guilty Plea

**Defendants: Benjamin Benford II, 54, Southfield, Michigan
Leon Higging, 64, Detroit, Michigan**

Date: January 27, 2005

Two Individuals With Former Ties To River Rouge School District Plead Guilty

United States Attorney Craig S. Morford announced that two individuals once associated with the River Rouge School District entered a guilty pleas in federal court today before United States District Judge Victoria Roberts. Ex-Superintendent Benjamin Benford II, age 54, of Southfield, Michigan, pleaded guilty to Conspiracy to Interfere with Commerce by Extortion, and Leon Higgins, age 64, of Detroit, Michigan, pleaded guilty to Conspiracy to Commit Federal Program Theft.

With respect of Benjamin Benford, Mr. Morford stated that, "The information presented to the court at the time of the plea showed that between 1998 and 2002, the defendant was the Superintendent of the River Rouge School District and responsible for the annual evaluation of administrative employees. During that time period, Mr. Benford along with an administrative assistant, arranged for all administrative employees to pay him cash on Boss's Day, Christmas and his birthday. Depending upon the status of each employee, he/she would be expected to pay between \$30.00 and \$100.00 per event. Mr. Benford acknowledged that because of his position as Superintendent, his staff could reasonably believe that if the cash payments were not made, they might suffer some sort of economic harm."

Mr. Higgins, according to Morford, admitted in court that he had agreed with another

individual associated with River Rouge Schools to fraudulently bill the district for approximately \$160,000 worth of television equipment that was never supplied. Higgins was duly paid for the undelivered equipment, and he kept \$10,000 for himself, and delivered the remainder to the person with him he conspired to commit the offense.

The case was investigated by agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.